

AMHERST COUNCIL ON AGING MINUTES
October 30, 2007

Members Present: Daniel Clapp, Elsie Fetterman, Doris Holden, Rosemary Kofler, Tom McAuley, Stephanie O'Keeffe, Barbara Sutherland, David Yaukey

Absent: Janet Gorth

Staff Present: Nancy Pagano (Director/Program Director), Maura Plante (Assistant Director/Services),

Guests: Marge Babb, Jean Haggerty

Welcome:

Barbara Sutherland, Chair, called the Council on Aging meeting to order at 3:05 PM.

This special COA meeting was called to discuss the implications of Marlene Barnett's recent and sudden resignation from her position as Program Coordinator. **Nancy** explained that Marlene had been a dental hygienist in the school system early in her career. Due to a neck injury following an auto accident she was no longer able to continue that work. Marlene recently completed her Masters Degree in Public Health Administration and found a new position in dental prevention and program development – a permanent position. Marlene's position at the Senior Center, by contrast, has been unstable and insecure, having been cut over the years from full time to 3 days per week and now 2 days per week. Since her salary primarily comes out of 'soft' (grant) money, there was always the risk that her position at the Senior Center could be eliminated. On behalf of all members, Nancy wishes Marlene "all the best". Nancy would like to plan a luncheon for Marlene. Her last day here will be November 9.

Nancy referred us to the spreadsheet and the \$15,245 reduction – a 7.5% cut in our budget. According to Town Manager, some departments will receive further cuts – public safety, police, fire, public works will probably not be cut any further, but human services are clearly vulnerable. Nancy also shared some of Larry's comments from her recent conversation with him.

- The most financially secure, well-cared for age group is elders. Children are the neediest. (Response: We focus on 'struggling' seniors).
- He suggested giving up our food programs to save money. He believes it is unusual to have food programs at senior centers. (Response: Our food programs are grant funded and do not use town money).
- He suggested cutting back on recreation to save money. (Response: Very little town money goes toward recreation)
- He suggested cutting the newsletter. (Response: That is paid for fully with ads and donations).
- He is focusing on LSSE intensely for cuts. In the future other departments will be viewed the same way. (Response: Our budget is only \$188,000. Karen generates \$15-20,000 to the Town by scheduling Munson. We generate 100s to 1000s in in-kind donations. Volunteers do a majority of the work.)
- **Larry says there is not end in sight to the structural deficit and cuts will be coming each year. Public safety and schools are the highest priority. All towns are in the same struggle.**

Marlene's base pay is \$25,564 for 20 hours per week (not counting benefits). Since the Formula Grant pays \$19,000 of her salary, the Town's portion toward her salary is only about \$6000. Marlene's pay scale is at Step 11, the highest level. The Town Manager agreed to let Nancy hire someone into her position. Someone starting out at Step 1 would receive an annual salary of \$30,454, substantially lower than the Step 11 (Marlene's level) full time equivalent of \$47,749. Step 1 prorated to a part time position means the entire formula grant could cover the total salary. The unfortunate situation now is that the new employee will have to understand the precarious state of that position because of anticipated future budget cuts.

Elsie wondered if this would be a good opportunity to get rid of the task of scheduling rooms for the Munson Library. Nancy explained that she has tried to do this over the years, with the previous Town Manager and now with Larry Shaffer. Both Town Managers understood the situation but did nothing to change the original 'deal' made by John Clobridge. It is difficult to measure the exact amount of time Karen spends on scheduling for Munson because of seasonal variation.

Steffanie spoke about the impact of the budget crisis on the Senior Center. It is difficult to know at this time exactly what that will be. We all need to be thinking about how time is spent. We need to figure out how to address the impact of the Town's structural deficit on the Senior Center. The question is "how do we go forward from here? What do we do right now?" She advised us that:

- 1) Nancy needs input/ideas from the COA on the budget.
- 2) Nancy would like assistance in creating the Senior Center priorities to present to the Town Manager.
- 3) The role of the COA is advisory.
- 4) We need to think about the programs we have. Our role is to advocate for the needs of the seniors in Town.

Nancy requested a vote from members allowing Steffanie to work closely with her. The Council unanimously approved. Nancy meets on October 30 with IT to crunch the numbers. On November 8 her budget is due. On November 15 she has the budget hearing. **Nancy would like the Council to be thinking about the Long Range Objectives and the FY 09 Objectives and submit their ideas.**

Nancy explained Marlene's role. Her primary role is to support Maura. Her work includes:

- Meals on Wheels – scheduling and paper work
- Wednesday Bread and Produce Program
- Noon and evening meal delivery when a driver is absent
- Survey of 80 and 90 year olds
- Arranging performers for Musical Showcases
- She started the Walking Club and is its advisor
- She organizes Senior Health and Fitness Day annually
- Acting as **Volunteer Coordinator is her biggest role** -- Marlene interviews all students individually. She designed a flow chart to place the students, gathers information about where they are needed, tracks them and supervises them. She does the same with community volunteers. Marlene interfaced with 275 volunteers last year.

It became clear to the Council that to fill Marlene's position will require an individual with experience beyond Step 1. We need a person we can trust, who is good with people, who is tactful and can judge who will be a good volunteer.

Elsie suggested we think carefully about which programs we could possibly cut. Nancy reminded us that even if a program has few participants, we need to think about the value of those programs for those elders. If elders are alone and far from family, a social program is extremely important to their mental health and it gives them something to look forward to. Nancy would like us to focus on the Long Range Objectives. Where are we going as a Council? What should we be focusing on in the broad sense?

Dan: One objective might be to maintain the services we have in the face of a diminishing Town budget. And - we need to look at how we are using the Friends Fund.

Nancy anticipates having to use the Friends money next year to replace any cuts to Town money for Center activities, office supplies, and conferences. She expressed gratitude to all COA members for the time they devote to volunteer activities at the Senior Center.

Tom expressed distress over the whole issue of the Town budget crisis. He feels the structure of the Senior Center must be changed. He is concerned about the Senior Center long range.

The COA meeting was adjourned at 4:20 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Rosemary Kofler, Secretary

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